

The London Bridge

When we hear the name “London Bridge”, we might be mistaken it with the London Tower Bridge unless we know well about it. But don’t worry, this article will explain everything about it from what have researched.

The picture on the right side is called the London Tower Bridge built in June 21, 1886 in London, not the one we hear about. In this article, I am not going to talk about the tower bridge, but the real London Bridge that used to situated for so long on the river Thames.



London Tower Bridge (Google Photo)

Old London Bridge

Before the old London Stone Bridge was built in 1176, there were several wooden bridges spanned the river Thames during the Middle Ages. The first London Timber Bridge was built by Romans to cross the river around AD 50. In order to unite Norway into one kingdom, the king of Norway, Olaf II of Norway led military campaigns and destroyed one of the wooden bridges in 1014. Two other bridges were built to replace, yet they were subsequently destroyed during that time.



Sample Design of a Roman Timber Bridge around AD 50 (Google Photo)

In 1176, Peter of Colechurch, a priest and chaplain of St.Mary’s Colechurch started constructing the foundation of first stone-arched bridge on Thames river which was the most famous and longstanding medieval bridge and finished in 1209 during the reign of king John. It consisted of 19 piers linked by 19 arches and a wooden drawbridge. Later, in order to maintain the bridge frequently, the shops, houses, churches and gatehouse were built on both sides of the roadway on it, which made its appearance unique and it became a fundamental commercial crossing point and residential site for people in London for over 600 years.

Three years after the completion of the bridge in 1212, the devastating fire in London destroyed all buildings and killed about 3000 people. However, the houses were quickly rebuilt. Two collapsed occurred in 1281 (five arches) and in 1437 (two arches) due to winter ice and when maintenance had been neglected.

Over the time, the number of houses on the bridge were increasing, reached its maximum and additionally it had fallen into severe disrepair frequently and blocked the traffic. Therefore, the city decided to remove

all the buildings on the bridge in 1762 in order to widen and rebuild with wide arches. So that two arches were combined into one wide arch and the bridge stood that way until new bridge was opened in 1831. The old London Bridge was totally disappeared in 1832.



The Old Medieval London Stone Bridge from 1209-1831 (Google Photo)

New London Bridge

The new design of London Bridge was proposed by Scottish engineer John Rennie in 1799, but he died before his design was approved in 1821. Thus, his two sons had to carry on with the project to begin in 1824. The work completed in 1831. However, because of the increasing traffic crossing the bridge, it started to sink in the river by 3 cm every eight years. Therefore, the east side of the bridge was lower 9-12 cm than the west side in 1924.



New London Bridge in London from 1832-1968 (Google Photo)

The New London Bridge lasted for 130 years in London and in 1968-1971, the bridge was sold to an inventor and entrepreneur, Robert P. McCulloch. Then, it was dismantled and shipped across the Atlantic Ocean by boat 10,000 miles to Arizona in the United States of America, to serve as a tourist attraction in Lake Havasu City. Robert Beresford, a civil engineer from Nottingham, England was in charge of the reconstruction of the London Bridge in Lake Havasu City. Now the New London Bridge is situated on the lake Havasu in Arizona, USA.



New London Bridge in Lake Havasu, Arizona, USA from 1971 to present (Google Photo)

Famous Nursery Rhyme “London Bridge is Falling Down”

“London Bridge is Falling Down” is an old English nursery rhyme and a singing game. Although it may date back to the Late Middle Ages, the first record of it only found in the 17th century. Some people believe that it is a story about Vikings attack, while some think that it is about the human and children sacrifice in the walls of the bridge. Nevertheless, it is always good to know about the interesting history and be rich in knowledge. Many of us might be familiar with rhyme though we could not sing in English when we were young. Well, if you are not familiar with it, I provided the singing game rhyme below.

“London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down. London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady. Off to prison you must go, you must go, you must go. Off to prison you must go, my fair lady.”

You might think the nursery rhyme sounds playful and the game is innocent, there are some evil stories about its origin. One theory described that in order to maintain the bridge’s longevity, there were human immurement which is a form of medieval punishment. Immurement is a kind of imprisonment with no exists or holes, in which a person is sealed within an enclosed space until death.

According to one belief, people during the Middle Ages believed the bridge would collapsed if there were not human sacrifices inside the walls. Some believed that might have been children sacrifices. Fortunately, there is no archeological evidence to prove this theory is true. Moreover, people consider “My fair lady” in the lyrics might be Virgin Mary, while some believe “My fair lady” is Eleanor of Provence who was a consort of Henry III and controlled the finance of London Bridge in the late 13th century or Matilda of Scotland who was a consort of Henry I and commissioned several bridges to be built in the early 12th century.

References

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